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ABSTRACT

An instrument was developed to identify the needs and concerns of graduate students enrolled in the College of Education of the University of Tennessee (Knoxville). The instrument was designed to measure students opinions, perceptions, and needs. Issues addressed were: perceived quality of instruction; perceived quality of the administration of the graduate programs; and differential satisfaction of groups of students. Questions were first developed in a pilot study in 1988 and then were combined with questions derived from qualitative interviews with 15 students in the fall semester of that year. Topics generated by an open-ended questionnaire administered to about 100 students in 1989 were added, and the final instrument was administered in the spring semester, 1989 to a random sample of students in the College. The final instrument contained 77 items associated with five major categories: (1) administration (13 items); (2) faculty (17 items); (3) courses and curriculum (19 items); (4) facilities (24 items); and (5) personal concerns (4 items). The final instrument would not be appropriate for use at another institution because of the specific nature of the questions; however, the method of creating the instrument would ensure that concerns of students at the institution were addressed. Appendices contain the open-ended survey and the final survey. (SLD)

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DEVELOPMENT OF THE SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Presented As A Part Of A Symposium
At The Annual Meeting Of
Mid-South Educational Research Association
Little Rock, Arkansas

November 9, 1989

By

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Introduction

A university is responsible to the society in which it functions and which provides its support both for extending the boundaries of knowledge and for the dissemination of that knowledge. Mechanisms have been developed for the regular assessment of the quality of research and scholarship through a system of peer review and refereed publications. Despite the demonstrable unreliability of this system of measurements (Miller, 1987), it is generally accepted throughout the academic world.

However, studies of student needs, attitudes, and concerns have not been abundant. In particular graduate education has rarely been researched. Much of the research that does exist has come from the Educational Testing Service at Princeton, and much of that research pertains to the Graduate Record Examination (Katz and Hartnett, 1976). While researchers at ETS have continued to work in this area, other researchers have recently become interested in it. Several studies have now been conducted in the recruitment of graduate students (Malaney, 1984, 1985, Olson and King, 1985) and on graduate student retention (Girves and Wemmerus, 1986; Girves et al., 1986).

Research specifically related to graduate students' opinions about the quality of the administration of graduate programs, and

the quality of teaching by graduate professors is very limited. Research on funding for graduate students is still virtually nonexistent (Malaney, 1984).

Data gathered in preliminary studies described in the papers by Fowler and Reeves indicated that graduate students enrolled in the College of Education at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville had a number of concerns about their graduate programs. An exploratory pilot study, conducted by students enrolled in a graduate course on research methodology during the summer term of 1988, indicated that students were less satisfied with the administration of their graduate programs than with the quality of instruction received in their programs. When demographic, descriptive data were analyzed by groups--degree program, department, gender, and race some differences in satisfaction were noticed among these groups. As a follow-up to the initial survey, a series of qualitative interviews was conducted with fifteen graduate students enrolled during the fall session of 1988. Similar types of concerns/needs as those previously identified in the pilot study were noted during the interviews. These interviewed subjects also reported stress caused by insufficient time for studies, lack of financial aid, concern about the advisement process, and feelings of dissatisfaction with their part time enrollment at a time when they desired to be full time students.

Statement of the Problem

Graduate education students' opinions, feelings and needs as stated in seminar discussions, hallway dialogue, and out-of-class conversations lead to the perception of widespread dissatisfaction at one university. The perceptions of this widespread dissatisfaction of graduate students in combination with the lack of research on graduate students led to this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this particular study was to further develop an instrument designed to identify the needs and concerns of graduate students enrolled in the College of Education. The process of developing such an instrument and the instrument itself were important goals because research which specifically identifies graduate students' concerns about their programs is limited (Malaney, 1984). Previous studies have been informal and limited to the classroom level, while this one was college wide in scope. Higher education program changes work best when informed by the values, experiences, and needs of those affected by the changes (Levine, 1980).

Importance of the Study

This survey instrument was designed to measure graduate education students opinions, perceptions, and needs. A better understanding of students and their felt needs in these specific

areas would help the faculty in the College of Education at UTK, as well as other colleges of education, better meet students' stated needs. Meeting the needs of the students is a vital role of an educational institution.

Questions Addressed in the Study

(1) What is the perceived quality of instruction in graduate education programs within the College of Education at UTK based on graduate education students' opinions, perceptions, and feelings? (2) What is the perceived quality of the administration of graduate programs in the College of Education at UTK? (3) Are some groups of graduate students more satisfied than others?

Methodology

Questions related to the problems first identified during the pilot study conducted during the Summer Session, 1988, were combined with questions that were identified during the qualitative interviews conducted during Fall Semester, 1988 and then were combined with the topics generated by the open-ended questionnaire administered during the Spring Semester of 1989. The final instrument was developed by grouping the answers to the open-ended questionnaire and similar topics from the other questionnaires. The final instrument was then administered during the Spring Semester of 1989. Participants were also asked to provide demographic information about their age, gender, race,

enrollment status, degree program, and department.

The open-ended survey was administered to about 100 students representing a cross section of those enrolled in the College of Education during the Spring Semester of 1989. An attempt was made to ensure that doctoral, specialist, masters and undeclared students from a variety of departments within the College were included so that an area of concern specific to a certain degree program or department would not be overlooked. Questionnaires were distributed and collected during class sessions ensuring a very high rate of return. Completed questionnaires were then analyzed and answers grouped into logical sets.

Questionnaires were analyzed for the various concerns/needs identified by the students. Many of the same concerns identified both in the pilot study and in the qualitative interviews appeared again, however, some new areas of concern were also identified. Variables were classified as satisfying or dissatisfying due to the nature of the questions asked ie. "What are the three most satisfying/least satisfying aspects of your academic program?" Many of the aspects of the degree program identified as dissatisfying were the advising, the scheduling of course offerings, opportunities for research and publication, and interaction with faculty. Faculty teaching and course content were generally perceived as satisfying. Parking was the most frequently listed source of dissatisfaction with the physical plant. The characteristics about the physical plant identified as satisfying included the campus greenery and the set up of the

class rooms. The greatest needs most often identified were for time and money which were generally also listed as needs which were not being met at that time.

Questions related to the concerns expressed in the pilot study, the interviews and the open-ended questionnaire were written. Information obtained from the open-ended survey was grouped by topic. Concerns that seemed to be related such as admissions requirements, the process of admission, the registration process, and orientation were grouped together as one major category. What resulted were five major categories: **administration**, **faculty**, **courses/curriculum**, **facilities**, and **personal concerns**, with a number of questions associated with each.

The interval data were measured by a Likert type five-point scale, with the scale running from 1 (needs extensive improvement) to 5 (is very good). A rating of 3 was considered to be adequate. The choice of "not applicable/no opinion" was also made available. The questions were worded so that the appropriate response made a statement. For example, the item "financial aid availability" and the choice of 3 (is adequate) made the statement, "Financial aid availability is adequate." Wording was carefully checked to ensure that the appropriate question had been asked.

The final instrument contained 77 items which were associated with the five major categories. There were 13 items associated with **administration**, 17 with **faculty**, 19 with

courses/curriculum, 24 with the **facilities**, and 4 with **personal concerns.** An additional 15 demographic items were included so that sub-groups of the population surveyed could be analyzed. The demographic items included: degree program, department, enrollment status (the number of hours carried that particular term), the number of credit hours earned to date, whether an advisor had been chosen, age, gender, and race. A final question provided space for additional comments.

Prior to the administration of the final instrument, a field test for readability and clarity was conducted with a small sample at a similar institution. As a result, the wording of several questions was modified to improve clarity. The final instrument was then administered to a random sample of students enrolled in the College of Education and on campus taking classes. Copies of the final instrument were also mailed to students no longer on campus, but still currently enrolled for dissertation hours. (See Appendices for a sample of the final instrument.)

Conclusions

The success of the final questionnaire was due primarily to the use of student input in the development of the major categories, and of the specific questions associated with each. The concerns/needs chosen for inclusion in the instrument were identified during the process of the pilot study, the interviews, and the open-ended questionnaire as concerns/needs students

actually had. This resulted in the development of a final instrument which assessed the severity of some concerns and which could assist administrators in making decisions about program improvements based on the results obtained from using the instrument, and as discussed in the paper by Roney.

Due to the differences between institutions and even colleges within an institution, the final instrument developed for this study would not be appropriate for determining student concerns at a different institution. For example, other institutions might not have the same parking problems as the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. The process used, however, to develop the final instrument would be appropriate to replicate at another institution if should the need arise to survey student concerns. Using the method described in this paper would ensure that the actual concerns of the students at that particular institution were addressed in the final instrument.

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APPENDICES

OPEN-ENDED SURVEY
ON GRADUATE STUDENTS' ATTITUDES

COLLEGE:_____ DEPARTMENT:_____

How many hours are you taking this semester?_____
How many hours have you already completed?_____

DEGREE PROGRAM: Ph.D._____ Ed.D._____ Ed.S._____ M.S._____
Certification_____ Unclassified_____ Other_____

AGE: Under 25_____ 26-30_____ 31-40_____ 41-50_____ 51+_____

SEX:_____ MARITAL STATUS:_____

What three aspects of your academic program at UTK are most satisfying to you?

What three aspects of your academic program are least satisfying to you?

What three aspects of UTK's physical facilities are most satisfying to you?

What three aspects of UTK's physical facilities are least satisfying to you?

As a graduate student, what are your three greatest needs?

GRADUATE STUDENT SURVEY

UTK COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

This survey is part of a study to determine student satisfaction and concerns with graduate education in the College of Education at UTK. The results are intended to produce recommendations for ways to improve the quality of graduate student life. Your anonymous, candid responses will be appreciated. Participation is voluntary, but we hope you will give us your opinions. Reports will be made to each department and to the college administration in such a way that individuals cannot be identified. Departmental data will be reported in such a way that only the departments themselves will know which is their unit.

Please circle the number on the 1 - 5 scale for each item below where 1 = Needs extensive improvement, 3 = Acceptable, and 5 = Very good. If you have no opinion (NO) or an item is not applicable (NA) to you, check the blank at the right of each scale. **THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP.**

	Needs Extensive Improvement		Is Acceptable		Is Very Good	NO or NA
1. The admissions process						
a. clarity	1	2	3	4	5	___
b. efficiency	1	2	3	4	5	___
2. Orientation of new students	1	2	3	4	5	___
3. Course registration efficiency	1	2	3	4	5	___
4. Reasonableness of fees						
a. tuition/maintenance	1	2	3	4	5	___
b. student activities	1	2	3	4	5	___
5. Financial aid						
a. publicity	1	2	3	4	5	___
b. availability of grants	1	2	3	4	5	___
c. size of grants	1	2	3	4	5	___
d. counseling	1	2	3	4	5	___
6. Dept./college assistantships						
a. availability	1	2	3	4	5	___
b. amount paid	1	2	3	4	5	___
7. Job placement services	1	2	3	4	5	___
8. Course quality in major	1	2	3	4	5	___

CONTINUE ON BACK

	Needs Extensive Improvement		Is Acceptable		Is Very Good	NO or NA
9. Course quality in other College of Education departments	1	2	3	4	5	___
10. Course quality outside College of Education	1	2	3	4	5	___
11. Graduate courses at UTK						
a. relevance	1	2	3	4	5	___
b. frequency of offering	1	2	3	4	5	___
c. times offered	1	2	3	4	5	___
d. redundancy	1	2	3	4	5	___
e. theoretical content	1	2	3	4	5	___
f. practical content	1	2	3	4	5	___
g. balanced between the theoretical & practical	1	2	3	4	5	___
h. summer term availability	1	2	3	4	5	___
12. Emphasis on writing activities	1	2	3	4	5	___
13. Emphasis on "Hands-On" experiences	1	2	3	4	5	___
14. Grading	1	2	3	4	5	___
15. Clarity of program requirements	1	2	3	4	5	___
16. Doctoral						
a. residency requirements	1	2	3	4	5	___
b. seminars	1	2	3	4	5	___
17. My Advisor's						
a. availability	1	2	3	4	5	___
b. helpfulness	1	2	3	4	5	___
c. knowledge of field	1	2	3	4	5	___
d. mentoring	1	2	3	4	5	___
e. instruction	1	2	3	4	5	___
18. Degree to which my major professor involves me in						
a. research	1	2	3	4	5	___
b. other professional activities/associations	1	2	3	4	5	___
c. publications/presentations	1	2	3	4	5	___

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	Needs Extensive Improvement		Is Acceptable		Is Very Good	NO or NA
19. Other professors in my department						
a. availability	1	2	3	4	5	___
b. knowledge of field	1	2	3	4	5	___
c. as instructors	1	2	3	4	5	___
d. involve students in their research	1	2	3	4	5	___
20. Professors in other departments in the college						
a. availability	1	2	3	4	5	___
b. knowledge of field	1	2	3	4	5	___
c. as instructors	1	2	3	4	5	___
21. Opportunities for faculty-student interaction	1	2	3	4	5	___
22. Psychological support from faculty and peers	1	2	3	4	5	___
23. Advisement and direction of program	1	2	3	4	5	___
24. Career guidance	1	2	3	4	5	___
25. Facilities (buildings)						
a. classrooms and labs	1	2	3	4	5	___
b. classroom furniture	1	2	3	4	5	___
c. student offices	1	2	3	4	5	___
d. student lounges	1	2	3	4	5	___
e. secure storage for student materials	1	2	3	4	5	___
f. athletic/recreational facilities	1	2	3	4	5	___
g. cleanliness	1	2	3	4	5	___
26. Parking						
a. during the day	1	2	3	4	5	___
b. evenings	1	2	3	4	5	___
27. Parking for GA's/students working on UT-sponsored projects	1	2	3	4	5	___

CONTINUE ON BACK

	Needs Extensive Improvement		Is Acceptable		Is Very Good	NO or NA
28. Equipment						
a. in classrooms and labs	1	2	3	4	5	___
b. microcomputer availability	1	2	3	4	5	___
29. The Library						
a. adequacy of collection	1	2	3	4	5	___
b. hours	1	2	3	4	5	___
c. orientation	1	2	3	4	5	___
d. knowledgeable and helpful staff	1	2	3	4	5	___
e. nearby parking	1	2	3	4	5	___
30. Vending areas	1	2	3	4	5	___
31. On-Campus eating facilities						
a. convenience	1	2	3	4	5	___
b. food quality	1	2	3	4	5	___
c. hours	1	2	3	4	5	___
d. attractiveness	1	2	3	4	5	___
32. Housing for graduate students						
a. adequacy	1	2	3	4	5	___
b. access	1	2	3	4	5	___
33. Opportunities for student-student interactions	1	2	3	4	5	___
34. Tailoring of academic programs to student needs	1	2	3	4	5	___
35. Sufficient time						
a. for social interaction	1	2	3	4	5	___
b. to complete course requirements	1	2	3	4	5	___

Please also complete the following personal items to help us interpret the responses to the previous assessments.

36. Your degree program:
___ 1. Ph.D.
___ 2. Ed.D.
___ 3. Ed.S.
___ 4. M.S.
___ 5. Certification
___ 6. Unclassified
___ 7. Other, Specify _____

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37. Major department
___ 1. Art and Music Education
___ 2. Curriculum and Instruction
___ 3. Educational and Counseling Psychology
___ 4. Educational Leadership
___ 5. Health, Leisure, and Safety
___ 6. Physical Education and Dance
___ 7. Special Services Education
___ 8. Technological and Adult Education
___ 9. Other, Specify _____

38. Do you have a major advisor designated?
___ 1. Yes
___ 2. No

If yes, approximately how many hours had you completed when advisor was designated?_____

39. Number of hours enrolled for this semester
___ 1. fewer than 4
___ 2. 4-6
___ 3. 7-9
___ 4. more than 9

40. Number semester hours completed prior to this term in major
___ 1. fewer than 12
___ 2. 12-24
___ 3. more than 24

41. Number UTK graduate semester hours completed prior to this term in College of Education departments other than major
___ 1. fewer than 6
___ 2. 6-12
___ 3. more than 12

42. Number of UTK graduate semester hours completed prior to this term outside the College of Education

___ 1. fewer than 6
___ 2. 6-12
___ 3. more than 12

43. Are you a graduate assistant?
___ 1. Yes
___ 2. No

44. Are you employed on a UT-related project?
___ 1. Yes
___ 2. No

CONTINUE ON BACK

45. Would you be willing to pay an additional fee for the privilege of parking in a lot designated for graduate students closer to the campus center?
    ___ 1. Yes
    ___ 2. No
    ___ 3. Not sure

46. Gender
    ___ 1. Female
    ___ 2. Male

47. Racial/Ethnic Group
    ___ 1. Black
    ___ 2. Hispanic
    ___ 3. White
    ___ 4. Other, specify _____

48. Age
    ___ 1. under 26
    ___ 2. 26-35
    ___ 3. 36-45
    ___ 4. 46-55
    ___ 5. over 55

49. Did you come from outside the Knoxville area to attend U.T.?
    ___ 1. Yes
    ___ 2. No

50. Do you live in U.T. housing?
    ___ 1. Yes
    ___ 2. No

51. Additional comments:

Please indicate any difficulties or ambiguities you encountered in completing this form.